

Nezavisne novine: Interview with PDHR Tamir Waser



By Dejan Šajinović

The Bonn Powers remain, but the current approach now is less imposition and more mediation, said Tamir Waser, Principal Deputy High Representative.

He thinks that the OHR is not an obstacle to democratic processes and compromises, pointing out that claims to the contrary are just an excuse for local politicians.

“The key example showing this is the „Sejdić – Finci“ case. We had no role in this and you can see how far we have gone“, Waser said.

Nezavisne novine: What is the OHR really doing in BiH today? There are different interpretations of its role and importance.

Tamir Waser: The role of the Office remains in general the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Agreement, which is confirmed from year to year by the UN Security Council. What has changed is the way how we implement it. Lately, we have been more focused on local actors. We are trying to help them with decision-making, implementation of legislation, and we are also here to remind them of the obligations they have under the Dayton Agreement.

Nezavisne novine: And what is it like on a daily basis? Do they call you? Do they ask for your assistance...?

Tamir Waser: We do many things behind the scenes. Mostar would be a good example. For instance, my predecessor had over a hundred meetings there with politicians and officials. He tried to make them reach a compromise. It is just an example. There are many other examples where we meet with different parties and try to create a basis for a compromise. We receive many questions related to laws, application of the constitutions and so on. In a way, we give informal advice to the parties how they should behave and act.

Nezavisne novine: It looks like the Bonn Powers are a matter of the past. Are they?

Tamir Waser: The Bonn Powers remain. But, the International Community holds a view that a different approach should be used now, one with less imposition and more mediation. But, if needed, they are still here.

Nezavisne novine: In the RS and in Croat political circles, there is a view that the OHR jeopardizes democratic processes in BiH and reaching local consensus. What do you think about this?

Tamir Waser: Of course I disagree with this and there are many examples which show this. The key example showing this is the „Sejdić – Finci“ case. We had no role in this and you can see how far we have gone. I think this is more a justification and a wish to divert voters' attention from concrete problems. And the problems, as you know, are new jobs, economy.

Nezavisne novine: Anti-Dayton rhetoric is an interesting question. Why is it a problem for democratically elected politicians in BiH to express their views on the future of BiH? Why is this „anti-Dayton rhetoric“?

Tamir Waser: Basically, politicians are entitled to say what they think about the future of the country, but within the constitution which must be a basis for all debates. For

example, someone can say that a particular tax policy should be introduced, someone can think that a different education system would be better, etc. But when someone says that this country does not exist or will not exist in the future, in particular if you have in mind the history of this country, it can be a big problem. Secondly, if someone destabilizes institutions with their actions, it is another side of the problem. If elected officials work responsibly, then they must work within the institutions and if they want to bring in change then they must work on the basis of the constitution.

Nezavisne novine: I have exactly asked that. So, if a politician says: "I want to bring in change in how this country looks like and therefore I apply institutional process". What is the difference between "anti-Dayton" view of the future and "democratic" view of the future?

Tamir Waser: What we have seen is that this is being done beyond the constitutional framework. For example, to change something at Entity level that is the competence of the state level. If one wants to amend the Constitution, this is to be done through the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. So, if something is done outside the constitutional framework, it is the reason for concern.

Nezavisne novine: Why is OHR against the agreement on "Elektroprenos BiH", if the objective is to change the manner of revenue distribution exactly through implementation of institutional process?

Tamir Waser: Several years ago Entity Ministers and BiH Ministers agreed that management changes should be primarily made and appropriate investment plan adopted. After that, they should identify the amount of money left and see what is the possible amount to be distributed amongst the Entities. Had this been done earlier, that would have been poor management of the Company.

Nezavisne novine: If they, nevertheless, adopt these amendments to the law, will OHR intervene?

The process was stopped, since the Bosniak Caucus invoked the vital national interest. Now Entities have additional time to establish management and adopt investment plan so that our focus is on what they are going to do.

Nezavisne novine: This practically means that SDA “saved” the situation from OHR intervening?

Tamir Waser: The invocation of the vital national interest provided some time for the Entities to do what is expected from them.

Nezavisne novine: How are things going with the FBiH reform?

Tamir Waser: OHR truly supports reform of the FBiH Constitution. I commend the expert team that worked together with civil society and came up with a plan A. I have to say that this is not the only plan. I would also commend the role the Speaker of the FBiH Parliament Škaljić, who was very interested in and invested much effort into the issue. Some parties provided their proposals – SDP and SDA. That is the way how things should be done. We expect other proposals, too. After that, we expect a debate on all these proposals and want to see progress on this issue. The present structure is too costly and is not efficient.

When it comes to the reform, it is a challenge at any time. We still hope that it is possible to have voting, at least on some ideas, before official commencement of the election campaign.